United Nations A/AC.198/1998/3

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 March 1998

Original: English

Committee on Information
Twentieth session
4-15 May 1998
Substantive questions

Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit the reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, covering the activities of JUNIC during 1997, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. JUNIC held its twenty-third session at the International Labour Organization (ILO) Training Centre at Turin, Italy, from 1 to 3 July 1997, under the chairmanship of Mr. Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. Directors of Information and officials of 24 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The report on the session was presented to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). JUNIC considered a variety of matters relating to inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. A brief summary of the discussion and an account of some of the follow-up action on decisions taken at the session on issues that could be of interest to the members of the Committee on Information is set out below:

3. JUNIC focused its deliberations on an open-ended discussion of ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations. Members of JUNIC emphasized the need to promote an information and communication culture in all organizations of the United Nations system to reinforce the efforts of their information professionals in promoting a positive and unified image of the system. Owing to the lack of such a culture in many parts of the United Nations system, information was often the first to be subject to budgetary cuts with serious negative consequences. JUNIC noted the need for a concerted system-wide approach to public information activities with respect to United Nations reform, which should be presented as a process of strengthening efficient management practices and making the United Nations system continually relevant to the changing needs of its constituencies, rather than a process of cost-cutting and benchmarks. Members agreed on the need for the United Nations system to communicate its achievements and its relevance through a unified message based on the different perspectives of member organizations, using modern technology and expertise.

4. JUNIC also considered the increasing importance of the Internet as the fourth medium for the dissemination of information, while recognizing that its current impact was largely limited to certain developed countries. It stressed that, while technical aspects of the Internet were monitored through the JUNIC Technical Advisory Group on the use of computer technology in the field of public information, JUNIC needed to look into the development of basic guidelines that would set minimum standards with respect tot the content of information posted on the "home pages" of member organizations to ensure the consistency of

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messages conveyed and avoid fragmentation within the system. JUNIC decided to convene an open-ended group to prepare the text of system-wide guidelines for the posting of information on the Internet, for consideration by ACC.

5. JUNIC also held an initial discussion of the issues arising from the relations of member organizations with the business community, particularly in the field of public information. Several members shared their experiences in that regard and pointed to the advantages and drawbacks of such an approach. It was noted that the business community could be approached both as a source of funding and as a partner, but that certain benchmarks and standards needed to be followed in order not to violate United Nations regulations. JUNIC agreed to continue the discussion on this issue in the future.

6. JUNIC also discussed several issues pertaining to the Non-Governmental Liaison Service which complements the role played by relevant units within the organizations of the United Nations system in providing public information and liaison services to non-governmental organizations. JUNIC endorsed the proposal, later endorsed by ACC, that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) undertake the role of lead agency of the Service for the period 1997-1999, under the chairmanship of Mr. Sadig Rasheed, Director of the Programme Division of UNICEF.

7. With regard to a system-wide publication on development issues, several members of JUNIC agreed on the need for an authoritative journal published by the United Nations which would include coverage of its development efforts. The representative of the Department of Public Information* noted that *Development Update*, a publication initiated during the recent cycle of global conferences on issues of economic and social development, had recently been revamped but a more solid budgetary base was needed for its continued production. Members of JUNIC suggested that the Committee should undertake a system-wide review of all newsletters and other similar publications before developing a proposal on a possible system-wide publication.

8. JUNIC also discussed progress with regard to the participation of the United Nations system in the upcoming international expositions, scheduled to take place at Lisbon in 1998 and at Hannover, Germany, in the year 2000.

9. Regarding the Lisbon Exposition 1998, entitled "The oceans: a heritage for the future", JUNIC was informed that the Secretary-General had appointed Ms. Hélène Gosselin, Director of Public Information of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as the Coordinator/Commissioner-General of the United Nations pavilion at the Exposition. Mr. Jan Ralph, who had been nominated by the United Nations, had been appointed by the Lisbon Exposition Authority as the Technical Director of the United Nations pavilion, to prepare an attractive presentation on a limited number of issues within the theme of oceans. In accordance with the ACC Guidelines for joint participation of the United Nations system in international expositions, the entire cost of the participation was to be covered by the host authority from a trust fund established for that purpose. The Exposition is scheduled to be open from 22 May to 30 September 1998.

10. With regard to the Hannover Exposition 2000, to be held under the theme "Humankind, nature, technology", JUNIC recommended, and ACC endorsed, the designation of the Department of Public Information as the lead agency for the joint United Nations participation in this event. The representative of the host Government reiterated the strong interest of his Government in United Nations participation in the event. The representatives of the Exposition Authority introduced a pre-feasibility study on the proposed United Nations pavilion, prepared for fund-raising purposes. Their fund-raising efforts are continuing.

11. JUNIC also discussed joint information activities for several upcoming events and observances. The Department of Public Information introduced its information programme for the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) and for the 1998 special session of the General Assembly on drug issues. It also introduced the information programme for the 1998 observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, under the theme "All human rights for all people", and invited the members of JUNIC to take part in joint information activities. The Department also introduced several proposals for information activities to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping in 1998.

12. In accordance with the principle of rotation, JUNIC recommended, and ACC endorsed, the appointment of Mr. Richard Leclair, Manager of the Information Programme of the World Health Organization, as Chairman of JUNIC for a two-year term (1998-1999).

13. The twenty-fourth session of JUNIC is scheduled to take place at the headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome in the first week of July 1998. In the course of the session, the Committee will take up a wide range of issues of mutual concern, aimed at

* The Department of Public Information has been renamed the Office of Communication and Public Information.

strengthening further inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. As has occurred in the last few sessions, however, its deliberations are expected to concentrate on the discussion of ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations, concentrating in particular on the modalities of better communicating development-related stories to mainstream media.